

Full Length Research Paper

Basic education from early childhood: Impacts of free primary education and subsidized secondary education on public ECDE centers in Nyahururu District, Kenya

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Kenya must invest more in education to realize her vision 2030. The government commitment to Education for All's goal has been expressed through provision of basic education in pre-primary, primary and secondary school levels. To this end, the government introduced two kitties; Free Primary Education in 2003 and Subsidized Secondary Education in 2008 (where the government paid tuition fees for the students in secondary schools), but left parents to finance Early Childhood Development and Education. Since public centers were not well equipped, only the poor parents enrolled their children. The study was carried out in Nyahururu District in 2010, to assess the impacts of the two government kitties on public Early Childhood Development and Education centers in Kenya. To evaluate the impact of the kitties on the public Early Childhood Development and Education centers, private centers were also studied together. The study revealed that while the kitties led to rising enrolment in primary, secondary school and private Early Childhood Development and Education centers, enrolment declined in public centers. The two have lowered the quality of education in public Early Childhood Development and Education centers since parents were unwilling to raise finances enough to employ and motivate teachers, buy teaching/learning resources, school facilities and school feeding program. High enrolment after Free Primary Education also took up classrooms meant for Early Childhood Development and Education in public centers.

Key words: Free primary education (F.P.E), subsidized secondary education (S.S.E), early childhood education and development (E.C.D.E).

INTRODUCTION

Education is a basic need for every child, and a vehicle through which poverty, ignorance and diseases could be eradicated and therefore Kenya needs to invest more in education in order to realize her vision 2030. In 1990 E.F.A conference in Jomtien, world countries reaffirmed their commitment to development of education for Africa (U.N.E.S.C.O, 1990). However, this has been a challenge to many countries. The conference asserted that learning begins at birth, and this forced Kenya to include 3yrs old children into preschools in her 1989-1993 development plan. According to the 2009 National census, the gains

realized in the education sector was the increased enrolment from 4 to 16 million in all levels of education from 1999 to 2009. This increase was attributed to F.P.E and S.S.E (Muindi, 2010).

However, the emphasis was concentrated to development of primary and secondary education and gave little room to consider its implication on Early Childhood education. There were 2,247,071 pupils in preprimary schools compared to 9,425,390, 1,796,467 and 198,119 in primary, secondary and university levels. Of major concern is that there are 6 million Kenyans aged 3 yrs and

Table 1. Key ECDE services, Kenya.

	Nursery school	Pre-unit	Kindergarten	Day care	Play group	Madrasa	Home based care centers
Age	3-5	5	2-5	2-5	2-5	2-5	0-3
Location	Rural and urban	Urban pry schools	Rich urban	Cities	Rural/ Urban		Urban, Slums and A.S.A.L.S
Focus	Care and education	Education	Care and education	Care and education	Care and education	Care and religion	Care
Opening hours	4 h daily	4 h daily	4-8h	4-8 h	4 h	Evening	8 h
Teacher education level	Primary and secondary	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary	None	No formal education	Pry or Sec education
Training requirement	2yrs DICECE	2yrs DICECE	2yrs DICECE	2yrs DICECE	2yrs DICECE	Integrated Islamic religion	No requirement
Responsible ministry	MOEST	MOEST	MOEST	MOEST	None	MOEST	None

Source: UNESCO, 2005.

above up from 4.5 million aged 5 yrs and above, who have never attended school in the same period. Earlier reports show that enrolment in E.C.D.E increased from 483,148 pupils in 1982 to 1,204,606 in 2003 (Republic of Kenya, 2005).

The government has been committed to E.F.A goals by providing basic education in pre-primary, primary and secondary school level. At pre-primary level it has been offered in E.C.D.E centers often attached to existing public and private primary schools or private pre-primary schools. Many parents and guardians have been unaware of the importance of Early Childhood Education which promotes holistic development of children (Mutua and Wasike, 2010). This has contributed to the low enrolment in public E.C.D.E. centers. Early years of life need to be utilized because these are the years that the child develops rapidly either physically, mentally, socially and emotionally. They form the milestone that lay the foundation of adulthood.

The results of government financing in the two levels of education are two-fold. Positively, it released the parents' financial burden in basic education, but negatively it developed a culture of free education that has impacted negatively on E.C.D.E, expected to lay the foundation of the two levels. Little attention has been given to consider this implication on Early Childhood Education (Keith and Caillods, 2001). There has been a rapid increase of enrolment in E.C.D.E from 483,148 pupils in 1982 to 1,204,606 in 2003 (Republic of Kenya, 2005). Despite this increase, the G.E.R in preprimary schools declined from 35.4% in 1990 to 33.4% in 1999, with 574,249 children of 4 to 5yrs old being out of school and many who entered primary school do not pass through preprimary schools. This has been due to minimal government support to E.C.D.E and lack of community awareness on the importance of E.C.D.E. This has worsened after introduction of F.P.E and S.S.E. The

study was therefore carried out to find out ways through which F.P.E And S.S.E has affected E.C.D.E in Nyahururu district.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Nyahururu district is in Rift Valley province of Kenya. The present study was carried out using descriptive survey. The study was carried out on a population of 1 D.E.O's office, 225 E.C.D.E teachers, 137 E.C.D.E managers and 225 E.C.D.E parents. Data were collected from all the respondents in the population. E.C.D.E managers were trained as research assistants and therefore administered the questionnaires to their teachers and parents. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

RESULTS

Data collected were organized in 6 educational zones named Salama, Maramanet, Igwamiti, Gituamba, Mwenje, and Nyahururu. All of them were rural areas except Nyahururu Township.

Ways F.P.E and S.S.E have affected enrolment of pupils in E.C.D.E

Data on total E.C.D.E enrolment for Nyahururu district in 2010 are summarized in Tables 1, 2 and 3. Table 3 shows that the total enrolment in the district was 5697 pupils. Table 6 shows the enrolment was less than 30% of that in Primary 1. Out of these, 2826 were boys and 2826 of were girls. Table 4 shows that the highest enrolment was recorded in the urban Nyahururu zone and productive rural zones of Kinanmba and Maramanet. There was low gender disparity in every age group. It also shows that pupils aged 4 yrs and 5 yrs were more

Table 2. Enrolment at Different Levels of Education, Kenya, 2009.

Province	Pre-primary	Primary	Secondary	University
Nairobi	155936	490314	176837	69345
Central	220621	987348	265881	25321
Coast	250380	758062	108401	8941
Eastern	257690	1509526	268751	13645
N. Eastern	24383	414541	60133	2431
Nyanza	426046	1513952	309130	18359
Rift Valley	640044	2475352	411416	49061
Western	271971	1276295	195918	11016
Total	2247071	9425390	1796467	198119

Source: Muindi, 2010.

Table 3. Enrolment in E.C.D.E by Age and Sex per Zone, Nyahururu District, 2010.

Zone	Preschools	3 yrs old		4 yrs old		5 yrs old		6 yrs old		Sub total		Total
		B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	B	G	
Salama	18	47	54	122	107	134	134	35	43	338	338	676
Marmanet	20	22	42	196	196	282	250	257	243	757	731	1488
Igwamiti	14	43	29	76	73	90	78	50	70	259	250	509
Nyahururu	13	37	42	89	111	124	107	81	66	331	326	657
Gituamba	17	21	22	71	69	124	109	55	41	271	241	512
Kinamba	55	132	155	268	304	350	340	165	141	915	940	1855
Total	137	302	344	822	860	1104	1018	1661	604	2871	2826	5697

Table 4. Distribution of Preschools by Sponsorship, Nyahururu District, 2010.

Zone	Public	Private	Total
Salama	14	4	18
Marmanet	11	9	20
Igwamiti	8	6	14
Nyahururu	8	5	13
Gituamba	13	4	17
Kinamba	25	30	55
Total	79	58	137

Table 5. Staff's establishment in E.C.D.E, Nyahururu District, 2010.

Zone	Public	Private		Sub total		Total
		M	F	M	F	
Salama	0	23	0	4	0	27
Marmanet	0	14	0	32	0	46
Igwamiti	0	11	0	9	0	20
Nyahururu	0	15	0	16	0	31
Gituamba	0	20	0	4	0	24
Kinamba	0	40	0	37	0	77
Total	0	126	0	102	0	225

compared to pupils aged 3 yrs and 6 yrs. There were 137 E.C.D.E centers in the district, 78 centers representing 58% being public and the rest 42% were private.

Ways F.P.E and S.S.E have affected the quality of education in E.C.D.E

Data collected on ways F.P.E and S.S.E have affected the quality of education in E.C.D.E centers of Nyahururu district are summarized in Tables 3, 4, 5 and 6. Table 3 shows that the district average enrolment was 41 pupils per center, but was not uniformly distributed. Table 5 noted that only 53% of teachers in public E.C.D.E centers

were trained compared to 90% of them in private centers. The district Teacher: Pupil ratio was 1: 25 but different in different zones. Table 6 shows that out of 5480 pupils, 841 of them who translate to 15% enrolled in Primary 1 without passing through E.C.D.E. Teachers in public centers were employed by parents while those in private schools were employed by private investors.

Ways F.P.E and S.S.E have affected the school facilities in E.C.D.E

Data collected on ways F.P.E and S.S.E affected facilities in E.C.D.E centers of Nyahururu district are summarized

Table 6. Pupils' transition from primary to primary schools, Nyahururu District, 2010.

Zone	Preprimary 2009	Primary 1, 2010	Pupils from home	Transition rate
Salama	531	651	120	123
Marmanet	1253	1453	200	116
Igwamiti	392	490	98	125
Nyahururu	582	638	56	110
Gituamba	382	493	111	129
Kinamba	1499	1755	256	117
Total	4649	5480	841	118

in Tables 3 and 4. Table 3 shows that there were 5697 pupils who demanded E.C.D.E, but only 79 public centers were available. The average distance between public centers was 3 km compared to private centers which were less than 1 km from each other. However, private centers were concentrated productive rural areas and urban areas. 60% of private E.C.D.E centers had transport facilities, but none of the public schools had them.

DISCUSSION

Ways F.P.E and S.S.E have affected enrolment of pupils in E.C.D.E

Enrolment in E.C.D.E has been declining in Kenya even before F.P.E, but F.P.E has also been found to accelerate reduction in participation rates (U.N.E.S.C.O, 2006). F.P.E has enabled over 1.3 million poor children in Kenya to benefit from primary education, raising enrolment from 86.8% in 2002 to 101.5% in 2004. However it has recorded both positive and negative effects on E.C.D.E in different areas. There was a great disparity in enrolment between rural and urban areas, poor and able parents, and productive and unproductive areas, for instance in dry North Eastern province, there is a sharp decline in enrolment while in better Rift Valley, Central and Nairobi provinces, only public E.C.D.E centers have been affected. There is also a huge gap between N.E.R and G.E.R which implies that presence of over aged pupils in primary schools suggests that parents over focus on E.C.D.E, while under aged pupils explain that quality of E.C.D.E is being compromised.

Due to the upsurge of pupils to primary schools after F.P.E, well up town preschools received an increased enrolment which demanded more teachers. However, the urban slums and poor rural areas parents withdrawal of children to wait for F.P.E led to low enrolment which demotivated preschool teachers, and some of them especially the trained ones migrated to towns schools and to other well paying jobs (Mensah, 2006). Wasike and Mutua (2006) attributed the low enrolment in public E.C.D.E centers in rural areas to lack of awareness about its importance, its high school fees and poor standards that prevent opening of centers in poor communities. The government of Kenya in collaboration with U.N.I.C.E.F

developed a policy framework called Social Budgeting Reform Framework. The policy gave a long procedure and poor prerequisites that communities have difficulties in fulfilling, making it more difficult to set up centers.

The policy recommended increase of E.C.D.E enrolment through a demand driven approach, but it was mooted in 2008. It recommended communities to manage and operate E.C.D.E centers with government support of teachers (U.N.I.C.E.F, 2006). In the process of the study, it was observed that religion and culture in communities in North Eastern Kenya was responsible for the low enrolment of 11% in 2006. The government realized this, and in the Sessional Paper No. 1 of 2005, emphasis was laid on removal of regional and gender disparities, and removal of discrimination of the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups (R.O.K, 2005).

In Nyahururu district, increased enrolment due to F.P.E and S.S.E has realized gender parity, and has raised the transition rate from Pre-primary to Primary 1 of 117% because of the pupils who enter primary without enrolling in pre-primary. Enrolment of pupils aged 3yrs and 6yrs was low than 4yr and 5yr old children which indicates that although the local community wanted education for their children, some did not enroll them in pre-schools. Other parents withdrew their children after getting basic literacy up to middle class level while others joined primary 1 after middleclass to enjoy the Free Primary Education.

The high percentage of private E.C.D.E centers in the district (42%) in 2010 indicated that there was high demand for E.C.D.E by children from well up families, and only the poor parents kept their children in the poorly equipped public centers because they could not afford to enroll them in the private ones which are better equipped. In all cases, public schools had one stream while most private schools had more than one stream. The high average pupils per center (71 pupils per center) in the urban E.C.D.E centers also show how parents in urban areas value F.P.E. Many parents therefore took their children to primary school, without enrolling to E.C.D.E to avoid paying school fees.

Ways F.P.E and S.S.E have affected the quality of education in E.C.D.E

Since 2003, the mandate of the Ministry of Education

Science and Technology (M.O.E.S.T) expanded to cater for E.C.D.E, but services for children under 3yrs of age were not well developed (U.N.E.S.C.O, 2005). Since introduction of F.P.E, poor parents tended to keep their children at home until they attained F.P.E age. Many parents refused to pay E.C.D.E school fees on argument that like public primary schools, E.C.D.E should also be free. Teachers depended on parents for their salaries, which were often pegged on enrolment which has reduced or became erratic. In fact, their job security is no longer predictable. Teachers in public E.C.D.E were poorly paid compared to those in private ones, and were therefore poorly motivated and always waited for an opportunity to get jobs in the private ones or other institutions.

At the district level, inspection of schools which is done by Zonal Inspector of Schools has become more concentrated to primary schools and less frequent in E.C.D.E lowering its quality. Despite the importance of E.C.D.E, the government only allocates less than 1% of her annual budget to it. In 2009, Uwezo Kenya conducted an assessment on basic literacy and numeracy skills of children aged 6 – 16 yrs in 70 out of 158 districts in Kenya. At Std. 2, 85% of the pupils could not read English, 81% could not read in Kiswahili and 79% could not do subtraction sums. The findings also showed that 50% of the pupils were not enrolled in E.C.D.E; many pupils were older than their classes and A.S.A.L.S have low enrolment and low attendance. In each class, pupils with educated parents performed better than their uneducated counterparts (Wikipedia, 2010). There was weak policy framework on E.C.D.E in Kenya.

Training of E.C.D.E teachers remain a priority if quality of E.C.D.E will be improved (Mbugua, 2010). But the T.S.C has been unable to absorb the E.C.D.E teachers citing inadequate funds to employ them. The World Bank sponsored a project from 1997 to 2004 to improve capacity building by training E.C.D.E for service delivery and meeting nutritional, health and learning needs of children. In order to integrate early childhood and formal learning and holistic development, the government therefore extended E.C.D.E to cover from 0 - 8yrs. M.O.E.S.T also recognized and detached it from primary education, into a subsector under Director of Basic Education. The ministry stress on the need for teacher training on use of teaching materials.

Most schools are however not equipped, other teachers are not trained and some of the trained teachers are not innovative so as to improvise their own teaching materials using locally available resources. Primary 1 teachers reported that those who skipped E.C.D.E had difficulties in coping with lessons in primary school and performed poorly. The low salaries for teachers in public E.C.D.E make them feel inferior to their primary counterparts in the same compound. This is worsened by the notion and condemnation by the society that E.C.D.E recruit teacher from students with low grade as reflected by the respect they get from the society. Due to low enrolment as a result of parents who skip E.C.D.E, pupils

are often merged with class one pupils under primary school teachers who are not trained on multi-grade teaching, lack teaching/learning materials and who become overloaded.

Teacher quality on the other hand is determined by training. A World Bank capacity building through N.A.C.E.C.E and D.I.C.E.C.E from 1997-2002 reduced the teacher: pupil ratio from 1:89 to 1:41. However after the project, training has become expensive and is now being pursued by P.1 teachers as a way of attaining a diploma status for promotion, but the teachers end up not practicing their skills in E.C.D.E. The curriculum developed by K.I.E is child centered interaction and emphasis on holistic development. But E.C.D.E teachers and centers must buy materials. In many cases, untrained teachers use lower primary syllabus to please the parents who pressurize them and see E.C.D.E as a means of to improve their children's marks in primary schools. They therefore revert to teaching alphabets and numbers while very little time is allocated to motor and creative work.

In Nyahururu district, 90% of all public E.C.D.E centers adopted parallel teaching where pupils for Baby class, Middle class and Pre-unit were enrolled in one room. This was due to shortage of teachers and space after classes were taken to meet the high demand for F.P.E. Many E.C.D.E teachers in public centers therefore complained they were overloaded. These classrooms are poorly constructed, oldest in their schools and collapsing. Considering the importance of E.C.D.E, dilapidated structures compromise standards of learning. Teachers in all public centers buy their own teaching resources, but because of low salaries they often improvise. Play facilities are also inadequate and many pupils are not attracted to them. In fact, although parents are willing, only 20% of public centers have a functioning school feeding program. Where pupils don't eat in schools, they carry food but this often disrupts the school program.

Ways F.P.E and S.S.E has affected school facilities in E.C.D.E

E.C.D.E was not funded as part of F.P.E and therefore faced the problem of insufficient funds. There was also lack of adequate parental awareness about the importance of E.C.D.E, while many parents in poor areas found school fees too high. This prevented opening of E.C.D.E in poor areas. In North Eastern province, only 11% attend E.C.D.E (Mutua and Wasike, 2010). Following the F.P.E intervention, N.E.R in primary schools rose by 22.3%, but although F.P.E increased participation rates, it led to shortage of teaching/learning facilities due to congestion in schools and classrooms. There was also an increased shortage of teachers with a teacher: pupil ratio at times rising to 1:60 which in turn led to increased dropout rates (Sifuna, 2010). Classrooms set up for E.C.D.E were taken up to accommodate extra pupils after F.P.E. In many cases only dilapidated classes were reserved for E.C.D.E.

In Nyahururu district, over 80% of the public E.C.D.E centers had only a class spared for E.C.D.E unlike their private counterparts which had sets of the three E.C.D.E classes. In the district, all the public E.C.D.E centers were attached to primary schools and therefore shared facilities like classrooms, play grounds, offices, toilets and kitchen. After introduction of F.P.E, 80% of the centers lost classes to enroll primary 1 pupils. Over 90% of the classes were poorly constructed with semi-permanent materials like mud walls and thatched with grass. All the public centers did not have transport facilities and permanent kitchens. This made pupils walk for long distances to school and often stay without food and therefore could not concentrate in class.

Conclusion

The study findings reveal that F.P.E and S.S.E kitties have affected public E.C.D.E centers in different ways. On access, the kitties have lowered enrolment in the rural areas where public E.C.D.E centers dominates as compared to the private centers with high enrolment in urban and productive rural areas. The kitties have also lowered the quality of education in public E.C.D.E centers owing to poor facilities, resources, teacher motivation, school feeding program and transport facilities. On facilities, F.P.E has raised enrolment in primary schools taking up classrooms meant for E.C.D.E. This has left E.C.D.E in dilapidated classes, with poor facilities and teacher resources, under low motivated teachers. The government should therefore step in to finance E.C.D.E by at least employing teachers in the public E.C.D.E centers.

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